DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 104 005 EA 006 935

TITLE Danger--School Ahead: Violence in the Public Schools.
INSTITUTION National Education Association, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE [75]
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Responsibility; Crime; *Delinquency Causes; *Delinquency Prevention; Elementary Secondary Education; Parent Responsibility; Social Environment; *Socioeconomic Influences; *Student Alienation; Student Responsibility; Teacher Responsibility; *Violence
IDENTIFIERS California; *Compton; Project Neglect

ABSTRACT

This report describes a study of violence in the schools of Compton, California, by a special team from the National Education Association. The study team examined the economic and social environment of the Compton community and how that environment contributes to an atmosphere of neglect and unrest in the area's schools. The study team also identified a number of other factors that are partially responsible for the recent increase in school violence: the increasing depersonalization of society and social institutions, including the schools; the increasing alienation of youth as a result of national economic and political events; the alienation of students by inflexible and outmoded educational practices; and the belief of many students that violence is a fundamental part of our society. In addition, the report discusses the responsibilities of parents, teachers, school administrators, and students, and suggests ways that each group can help prevent crime and violence in the schools. (JG)

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EA 006 935

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DANGER—SCHOOL AHEAD: VIOLENCE IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Introduction

Educational neglect is shown in many ways. Underlying all of them is a massive failure to concentrate on the central purpose of the schools—helping students to learn. When students recognize this root of neglect, violence is one result.

The NEA Project Neglect team studying violence in the schools was invited to Compton, California. Compton's schools are not the most violent in the nation, nor are California's. But Compton was a rewarding place to visit because its problems, growing out of unplanned change, unfamiliar challenges, and lack of communication, are common to cities throughout the country that are struggling to provide decent schools. Too often, such problems make people forget the students who are in the school now.

Compton was rewarding, too, because the team met some of those students, and some of the people who have not forgotten them. Parents, school staff members, and community leaders—as well as students—all gave the team some parts of answers to the problems of educational neglect.

"We Just Survive."

Statistics on violence in the schools show that in the past four years, assaults increased 58 percent; sex offenses, 62 percent; drug-related crimes, 81 percent; and robbery, 117 percent. The statistics are only estimates. But even if they were accurate, they still couldn't express the effects of violence. When violence becomes a known and accepted part of the school experience, everybody in the school community is a victim. Not only the people who suffer violence, but everyone who witnesses it, everyone who is aware of it, loses the confidence to walk the halls without caution. Preoccupation with personal physical safety drains away some of the alertness and energy that should go into learning and teaching. The young men and women who extort, who beat, who kill, have been damaged, too—they have become callous to some kinds of pain.

California's schools are only the ninth most violent in the nation. Yet in California during every month of 1973, there were about 28 assaults on school professional personnel, 9 on peace officers—and 74 on students. Every month, students were caught with guns, knives, or bombs 120 times; vandalism or theft occurred 1,379 times. In Compton, just outside Los Angeles, a student was shot to death in 1974. Most recently, a student was killed in a Los Angeles high school.

Visit an English class in Compton High School. It may be like classes in your school—if so, you know it. Or maybe there are classes like this somewhere else in your district, and you don't know it. . . .You pass the guard at the school door with a nod and a smile and no questions asked, because your appearance is respectable. A few of the students in the big, echoing corridor stare openly at you; most, talking and hurrying, ignore you. Echoes clatter against the dun, gleaming walls of the staircase that leads to the basement. Near the bottom lounge three young men. They seem exceptionally large and they stare at you; they aren't hurrying, they have nowhere to go. You don't quicken your pace, but you're glad to get inside the classroom with the teacher and the students. The teacher persuades the students to be quiet enough so he can tell them: Here's someone who wants to ask about violence in the schools. But the classroom wall is thin and it doesn't reach the high basement ceiling—you still hear the laughing and shouting in the corridor.

What are the most common kinds of violence in the Compton schools? A dreadful question, but it must be answered. And the answer isn't unexpected: extortion and assault. Almost a third of the students have been victims of assault; more than two-thirds have been witnesses. Elementary school pupils have been especially subject to extortion.

It isn't unusual to find a student carrying a weapon, concealed or unconcealed. Student lockers have been permanently wired shut so bombs and guns can't be kept there. In the district's most affluent high school, some parents are said to provide their children with guns for self-defense. They carry them in their attache cases. That's the only school where "hard" drugs are a real problem, but wine and marijuana are used throughout the district.

It's the combination of weapons and extortion that caused the killing at Compton High. A regular extortion victim was informed that he'd have to pay more in the future. When the day came and the collector approached, the victim, at the end of his resources, in desperation pulled out a gun and shot him.

The act became a statistic of school violence. People whose schools are free of killing can shake their heads at it. Criminologists can try to classify it: manslaughter? premeditated murder? self-defense? temporary insanity? All of these—or none? Responsible members of the school community will instead examine its meaning for students in school now.

Much of the violence in the Compton schools is attributed to organized groups, often called "gangs." Some of the groups are Afro-American, some are Chicano—fighting is mostly within, not between the two groups. There aren't any white "gangs," probably because only 1 percent of Compton's student population is white (about 85 percent are Afro-American, 14 percent, Chicano).

The bulk of the students refer to their peers who commit violent acts as "them." "They just act crazy." "They come to school sometimes, but they don't go to class." How do most students survive? By acting confident, unafraid—or inconspicuous. By being quick-witted and resourceful. The choice of strategy depends on individual personality and on alignment in the school hierarchy. A member of the intellectual elite acts differently from an ordinary student, who may just try to be invisible.

A representative of one organized group sees the situation in practical, not sociological terms:

> "If I ask you to give me a dollar, you can either give me the dollar or tell me where you're coming from. If you're not afraid of me, and tell me where you're coming from—suppose you need that dollar for something—you might not have to give it to me."

Teachers see little point in reporting violence. While an incident is taking place, a teacher dare not leave the class alone long enough to go for help—and often, in the Compton schools, the intercom doesn't work.

Teachers and students both say that a student who is reported to the administration or even picked up by the police is likely to return next day as a hero. At one point, students who were found outside school during school hours were taken to jail. A young person could decide every morning whether to go to school or to jail. Students thus had the chance to learn their way around the jail without having to serve a long sentence. In any event, the "correctional" institutions, local or state, hardly ever correct. The situation young people face on the outside doesn't improve, either. Those students who serve time once are likely to do it again and again.

"The whites ran away. When it got to be too much for them, they turned it over to us. And we're learning just as fast as we can."

Let's look at the city of Compton. Many of its handsome, roomy, two-story houses are boarded up. Some of the owners couldn't pay their taxes; others have just closed up their houses and gone to live somewhere else. Federal agencies own 5 percent of Compton's housing. Big corporations have moved in, attracted by a low tax rate. Compton needs jobs—the overall unemployment rate is 10 percent. For young people, it's far higher. And jobs are very important to them, both for money and for self-respect. But the corporations haven't brought many jobs, because what they're building is warehouses.

Compton would be a fine place for people from Los Angeles to live in high-rise apartments—it's close, and there's a freeway. But the people who live in Compton now like their one-family houses, their yards and wide streets. They don't intend to be cleared away to make room for apartment dwellers from the city. Compton's city government points to signs of progress—last year the major crime rates fell between 12 and 22 percent. Federal resources are being sought out. And Compton has survived a lot already.

In 1965, around the time of the rebellion in Watts, across the Los Angeles city line, Compton's population was 80 percent white. The "first wave" of Afro-American citizens had arrived in the 50's, bought houses, settled down. Watts and other events of the middle 60's brought the pressure of national issues to bear on Compton. White citizens looked across the boundary at Watts, not with compassion, but with a shudder. People who lived in Watts needed more room; many of those who could, moved over into Compton. Within two years, Compton's population was mostly Afro-American. By 1974, it was mostly young as well—the median age was 19.

More of Compton's citizens were school-age, and they were of a new kind. The schools weren't prepared to teach students from Watts. Change came, but the teachers and administrators didn't change. It was 1968 before the first Afro-American high school principal was appointed.

Before they could adjust fully, the schools were further disoriented by the consolidation in 1969 of four systems to form the Compton Unified School District. Unification brought more money, temporarily, as the four budgets were combined and old, long-standing bills were paid. But the affluence didn't last long. The new district never got beyond the "provisional" organizational structure it started out with, but state support for that structure ended in 1971. Some people in Compton think that structure is expensive and full of redundancies—no administrative positions were cut.

Many readers will recognize these problems—students and school hierarchies thrown hastily together, without the right kind of planning and preparation, confused, hostile. Each is tempted to blame what is alien to him or her, or to blame the process—to say consolidation (or integration, or redistricting) is just unworkable. In fact, the process hasn't been given a fair trial.

Finally, since 1972 some of the highest offices of both the city and the school district have been filled by new people. The city has a new mayor and three new school board members. The school system is led by an acting superintendent. All these people are learning their jobs rapidly—but they haven't yet learned to pool information, ideas, and objectives.

"We'd like to talk to the (school board, city government, teachers, students, parents, juvenile authorities)—but we don't."

Compton shares a major problem of many school districts in the United States. Different groups of people may want the same things to happen, may be working to accomplish the same things—but each group is working in isolation. For example, the Parks and Recreation Department may want to set up an after-school program. They'll do it on their own, without discussing it with the schools the kids will be coming from. Or the city may have the money for a vocational program—to train the graduates and the dropouts the schools hadn't the facilities to train. Maybe the police will sponsor a course in juvenile law—but students will have to go outside the schools to get it. In Compton, a halfway house for young people released from detention is funded directly by the state. The city government and the schools have nothing to do with it—in fact, they're said to be hindering it.

The teachers and the school administration both want good education, but the teachers are full of mistrust. Why is the central administration so big? Why are there so many vice-principals? What are their duties? How are they selected? They see plainly that the more professional staff leave the classroom, the more students are left for them to teach. As for students—"It's disgusting," said one teacher when a colleague ate lunch with her students. As far as the students can see, with very few exceptions "none of the adults cares anything about what we do or what happens to us. We're only killing ourselves. They only get upset when we burn something down." "They're just using us"—to earn a living, gain power, achieve prestige. A parent was a little more optimistic—"It's about 50-50. About half of us care." Would those who care work together to help all students? One mother, with a family of boys anyone could be proud of, responded this way: "Let's say I'm with you thick and thin. When the going gets thick, I thin out. I'm going to think of my children first." It's hard enough to raise one family with confidence and self-respect.

"I have just 6 months until I graduate. Then I'll have to support myself somehow. I could live off my parents, but that's not right. But how can I get a job?"

The person who said this is probably a member of one of those organized groups called "gangs." He and his colleagues are asking for three kinds of things.

First, they're asking for usable vocational education in the schools:

> "[Like many other Compton students,] I used to go to school in L.A. They started to teach us computers. Then we moved here, and there was no class, no equipment, nothing. I wanted to know about computers so I could get a job. We asked for a course, but they turned us off."

Compton doesn't have an adequate work-study program. "All of the job applications ask about experience," one young woman pointed out. "But how can we get experience if we can't get a job without it?" A young man wondered, "What do you say when they ask if you've ever been arrested? If you say yes, you don't get the job, but if you say no, they fire you for lying."

The only work experience available to many Compton students is in extortion. They can learn about that occupation any week on the evening news, in stories about the police, governments at all levels, politicians, major corporations. It's not respectable, but it brings a good living. It's power politics, old-fashioned but effective and well-publicized. It doesn't require training, experience, references, or capital. No wonder some of the students who have seen few benefits from respectability give it a try.

The second thing the students want is education they can apply, in an environment where they can learn. Many students spoke of the need for consistent, fair discipline. After all, some of the students are running disciplined organizations themselves—why can't the school administration do as much? Some of these students said they could get the violence out of the schools, but they don't believe the schools offer anything to replace the violence. They don't see how the curriculum relates to their lives. Things that happened long ago and far away—no one explains how they can help a person live now in Southern California. Too often, teachers "expose" students to "material" as if they were so many pieces of film—except that film gets "developed" after it's exposed. What relation does a leader of an organized group in Compton have to Beowulf fighting the monster in Anglo-Saxon England? "They don't ask on a job application, 'Who was Beowulf?' " The school has a responsibility to help students find the relationship—or to teach something more obviously "relevant."

The students are asking, finally, for something to do after school, in the evenings, on weekends. "There used to be a little gym where we could go and lift weights," said one, "but they closed it."

"We have to meet our friends in school," another pointed out. "There isn't anywhere else"—but it doesn't leave much time for going to class. Extracurricular activities? The teachers won't hold them after school, and the students won't come to them before school. Anyway, most of the students who once joined clubs have moved away, without recruiting anyone to take their place. Six tickets to Compton High's football games were sold last fall. "Who's going to go to a game when there's no band?" Who's going to take band when they have to take turns with the instruments? The students themselves had plenty of ideas. "The city has all those boarded up houses. Why can't we have one of them where we could give dances?" In fact, several of the students showed a strong desire to try their hand at business. When they got a Project-Neglect team member alone, they asked very practical questions about grants, proposals, management—how to get things done.

"The schools are the battleground where society fights its battles."

From its observations in Compton, the Project Neglect team drew several conclusions that may help other communities concerned about violence in their schools. Violence in the schools isn't an isolated and bewildering phenomenon. Nor is it just "something in the air," a contagious societal disease which students can catch like anyone else. The schools need not reflect *every* aspect of society. Attacking educational neglect, with determination to teach and determination to learn, has a chance of making the violence of our society irrelevant to the schools. Violence in the schools has specific causes, which specific groups of people can remove, each with their own kind of resources.

Good communication between the groups increases the effect of their efforts; they need to make sure they're all working towards the same goal, and to avoid duplication of effort. But lack of communication is no excuse for inaction.

Parents and Their Institutions

People of school age need attention—the right kind of attention—from adults. They need people who respect them enough to set reasonable standards for their behavior. They need people who care enough about them to take the time to see that they observe these standards. Years ago, you might steal an apple on the corner—but

by the time you got home, your grandmother would be waiting on the porch to speak to you about it. It's not a sign of love or respect to turn a 14-year-old loose to make all her/his own moral decisions. This is especially true in a nation where young people are systematically excluded from responsibility. The exercise of responsibility takes practice.

Many parents feel a bit desperate–"I can't do it all alone." They don't have to. After all, it was other people in the community who told your grandmother about that apple. Nowadays, grandmother may be in an old people's community or a nursing home. Even if she is, parents still can get help.

The Church. If they go to church, parents can make sure their church provides space and supervision for young people's activities–and not just social activities. Some people don't have a good place to study at home; the church can provide space for studying, and sponsor a tutoring program, too. It can enlist young people in doing the work of the church–helping old people, visiting people in institutions, cooking the church's Sunday dinner. Clubs and other community organizations can help parents in similar ways. The main thing is to ask questions and make suggestions and try things out until you find out what kind of activities the young people want, and how they want them organized. They may just want space for a project of their own, they may want transportation, they may want instruction or supervision. Then what they want has to be hammered out against what the church or club is able and willing to provide. After a trial period, the whole thing may have to be renegotiated. Instant success is common only on TV and that's a good lesson for both young people and well-meaning adults.

Public Officials. Most parents are eligible to vote, too, so they can work to elect candidates who will help them. School board and city elections have the most obvious effect on the kind of place children will grow up in.

What the schools teach, the physical and mental comfort of school buildings, the quality of books and equipment, the standards of conduct and type of discipline, the degree of democracy and student responsibility in the schools, the availability of credible work-study programs–all can be determined by school board policy. Unfortunately, school boards don't always concentrate their efforts on these issues. They sometimes assign priority to saving money, or keeping the tax rate down. In these cases, the results of miseducation raise the costs of other city services, such as law enforcement and public assistance. However, because the school board isn't held responsible for those budgets, it continues to hold its own budget down.

A city government can do several things to let young people grow up with confidence and sound ideas. It can establish standards of honesty, responsiveness to citizens, and public service. It can ensure that streets are safe and clean; that parks are pleasant and conveniently located, and that they have the staff and facilities for games. It can establish equitable tax policies that make business pay its fair share of the costs of city services. It can enforce the law fairly, avoid harassment and brutality, make sure offenders are punished, work with other governments at all levels to create correctional institutions that encourage inmates to abandon crime–and help them do so after their release. A city can even take steps to get local industries and businesses to cooperate in work-study programs.

State and national officials have less immediate effect on the neighborhood and the school, but state laws can affect curriculum, textbooks, teaching conditions, or student rights; laws that affect money can be passed at either level.

Parents can urge all these officials to actions they think will help them raise their children to be competent, confident, and responsible. When the officials do badly, parents can question the candidates in the next election, get (and write down) promises—maybe run candidates of their own choosing. That's a lot of work—but the chance of better government isn't the only repayment. Young people will see their parents putting in some time and hard work because they care about them. They'll learn something, too, about the democratic process—and probably about perseverance in overcoming failure. Students in Compton have already recognized the power of the ballot. They've started their own voter registration drive—and they've already gotten some opposition. Somehow their registration volunteer can't get enough registration forms for them. Compton's parents have an unusual chance to support their children by fighting beside them for the voter education drive.

Parents *can't* do it all alone. Sometimes they'll back the wrong candidate or the wrong proposal. Sometimes they'll lose, even when they're right—about an election or a school policy or a household rule. But they can make a difference, and it can be the decisive difference, to their own or someone else's children.

School System Staff

Within the limits of school board policies, available resources, and the law, the school system staff is responsible for what happens to students while they're at school. This responsibility takes different forms for administrators and teachers.

Administrators, from the superintendent to the assistant principal, have to be aggressive to get what they need for their schools. Too often, they, like school boards, concentrate on other goals—making the schools look peaceful, getting a good reputation, securing a promotion. Administrators who are afraid to let the quality of their leadership speak for itself attract community suspicion. "These folks just drain our time and money and drag us down," said one community spokesperson. Administrators' real responsibility lies in securing the essential resources of education:

- Courses that will teach students what they must know—in order to earn a living, to understand the histories and cultures that affect their lives, and to use humanity's experience in making their decisions.

- Textbooks and materials that will interest students and give them a true picture of the world. Administrators may get those books and materials through the school board, the federal government, private foundations, cookie sales, or writing and duplicating their own—so long as they get them.

- Modern laboratory facilities—not just for science, but for career education courses—whether they get them from established school sources, the Chamber of Commerce, the Lions Club, or the corporation branch in the industrial park.

- Teachers who are dedicated to teaching the students in their classes and are able to teach them. This means administrators must build teachers' morale. For one thing, they must recognize and support teachers who inspire the respect of their students, especially of their "difficult" students. Their assignments and promotions and other personnel decisions must be obviously fair and based on competence and performance. A teacher strike in Compton was followed by concentrated petty harassment of education association and strike leaders. If they're driven out of the system, the morale of all teachers will be driven lower.

Administrators' directives must be precise, so that teachers and students know exactly what the rules are. They must back up teachers' just complaints against students—and students' just complaints against teachers. They must work out, with teachers, procedures for incidents of violence, accident, or school disruption, and make sure every teacher knows those procedures. In Compton as in other schools across the nation, these procedures should include a list of people who can talk to students and parents who are fluent only in Spanish, or, say, Japanese, or Tagalog. Teachers who aren't bilingual have to have that kind of support for emergencies.

Administrators must give teachers the means to improve their teaching when that's necessary. The education association can help them plan the courses or counseling that teachers need.

Among administrators, a principal has a particularly heavy responsibility. She/he sets the tone of the school, lets teachers and students know what to expect and what is expected of them. One Compton secondary school changed a lot when it got a new principal this year. All the teachers now teach reading—the reading that students need in order to learn their subject. Different grade levels "own"—decorate and look after—different areas of the school. A student advisory council meets with the principal whenever they have something to discuss. Students who are persistently disruptive or break rules in other ways go to a special room where they do their classwork in a small, closely supervised group. Violence? The Project Neglect team didn't hear about any serious violence in the school—another change from last year.

Teachers find it a challenge just to keep on trying. It's tempting to blame the school board or the central office or the principal for everything—how can an isolated teacher make up for all their shortcomings? It's very tempting when there are fights every day in your class, and last week you took a knife away from a student for the eleventh time since September. But a teacher who wants to really teach, not just get paid for teaching, has to do more than just try to survive six periods a day.

The Project Neglect team got ideas from some of the teachers in Compton. "Violence? No. . .there hasn't been any in this class all year." That's right, said the students. No violence in this class. What is it about these particular teachers? Various students of theirs, questioned in an undertone, all came up with variations on one old, sentimental-sounding answer: "She cares." In Compton, that's a very practical answer. The teachers who care seem to be the only ones who are able to teach anything.

Just caring is not enough unless the students know about it. They know about it in Compton when a teacher spends time with them outside of class, without being paid to. That teacher could be relaxing or earning needed extra money or going to San Francisco for the weekend. Instead, she/he is working with students on their school problems, personal problems—whatever they bring.

Students praise one teacher who has overcome the limitations of a dry and obsolete text. Her tools are a duplicating machine and a fine teaching style. She shows she's serious about teaching, so students know she cares.

Another part of caring seems to be recognizing the different personalities and backgrounds of the students. Students notice which teachers recognize each student as an individual, which teachers take the trouble to learn about their students' cultures. Long-time Compton teachers have been asked to teach first middle-class whites, then middle-class and poor Afro-Americans, and now Chicanos, Mexicans, and Samoans. The school system hasn't given them the information and support they need in order to teach those students. Nevertheless, some teachers have gotten that information themselves; they get support from their students; and they teach well.

The teachers who care expect students to meet certain standards of behavior. There's a shade of surprise in the answer "Violence? No. . ." That teacher never expected any violence in the classroom. Maybe her students have too much respect for her and for themselves.

Caring—in the conventional sense of being an enthusiastic defender of everything young people do—isn't the answer. The answer in Compton seems to be doing things that show respect for students and determination to teach them.

Every teacher doesn't know by instinct how to do these things. Overcoming isolation in the classroom is a first step: teachers can get help from one another. Through the education association they can decide on standards and set out to bring all the teachers in the system up to those standards. They can put pressure on the school system to get the kinds of training they need. Any teacher who can learn to teach the students in her/his class must have ample opportunity to do so. On the other hand, the teacher who can't or won't use that opportunity does not belong in the classroom.

Students, like the adults in the schools, can easily talk themselves out of responsibility. Excuse is plentiful.

- Students have teachers and parents and maybe the police all causing them various kinds of trouble.

- Our society gives them examples. High school seniors can't remember a time before the Cold War; sixth-graders were born with the first Kennedy assassination and grew up with Vietnam on TV.

- The economy was bad for most of these students years before the media—let alone the President—admitted it was bad for the nation. The unemployment rate for young Afro-Americans is usually about the same as the national rate during the Depression of the 1930's.

- Morality? Values? Look at Watergate. Look at corporate tax rates. Look at the CIA.

- In short, the argument runs, why should students have higher standards than national public figures? Standards won't get them a job; there are no jobs. Even a job just means probably paying a higher tax rate than your employer—and being more honest than some members of the government that gets those taxes. This line of reasoning has been followed by many disillusioned people in the past few years. Young Americans, just because they are young, are even more likely than other Americans to want instant results for every effort they make. Or else.

Or else what? The only threat within in their power is the threat of wasting their own lives—through violence, drunk driving, drugs, just living to buy things, doing nothing at all.

To make that kind of threat, people have to be desperate. They also have to believe that they, personally, aren't worth saving. Desperation must have canceled the will to survive, the belief that they can have lives worth fighting for. Frustration—*always* facing impossible odds—must have worn away the self-respect that can say, "The President—or the principal—has low standards; I have high standards."

Clearly, however, students don't have to give up; they *don't* all give up. The students who talked with the Project Neglect team in Compton haven't given up. It

helps to have strong support from parents, but some survive without it. It helps to have the encouragement of a teacher or a pastor; it's very difficult indeed if no adult shows care. Sometimes friends keep one another struggling on. A young person has to be very strong to survive with nothing but unshakeable faith in her/his own ability. Even that happens.

Surviving, saving oneself, means getting different kinds of skills. For one thing, there aren't enough jobs for everybody who wants one, although there should be. But there are jobs for those who have more skills than the others who want those jobs. Part of surviving is getting the skills to get a job. In getting job skills, people will probably have to practice other kinds of skills—resourcefulness, practicality, planning, persistence. The same kinds of skills, combined with many kinds of information, can be used to start a business.

When they have the skills to survive, young people may start to want to do more than survive. They can save time by learning from other people's experience as well as their own. Resourcefulness, persistence and the rest will help them get at the usable information that's coded in the world's history, literature, science, philosophy. It's easier if the school, or just one teacher, or a librarian helps. It's possible with just public and institutional libraries.

Young people can also use their survival skills to help their younger sisters and brothers respect themselves and live. This chain of teaching and learning begins with the young people in school now, but it will have to go on for a long time. One student summed up the situation in Compton: "It's not so much the violence we're afraid of; it is the future."

BACKGROUND READING

More reports, articles, and court decisions on school violence and student rights are appearing every week. These are a handful of the readings available at the present time.

California State Department of Education. *A Report on Conflict and Violence in California High Schools*. Sacramento: the Department, 1973. 30 pp.

Institute for Development of Educational Activities. *The Problem of School Security*. Dayton: the Institute, 1974. 24 pp.

National School Public Relations Association. *Vandalism and Violence: Innovative Strategies Reduce Cost to Schools*. Washington, D.C.: the Association, 1971, 57 pp.

Today's Education. "Teacher Opinion Poll [Student Violence]." *Today's Education*, September-October, 1974. p. 105.

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THE PRICE OF LEARNING ENGLISH: ACCULTURATION OR CULTURAL ANNIHILATION?

Introduction

In January 1974, the Supreme Court rendered its landmark decision in the case of *Lau* v. *Nichols*. To schoolchildren who don't speak English fluently, the date is as significant as May 1954 has been for children in segregated schools. The 1954 case, *Brown* v. *Board of Education*, made segregation illegal. *Lau* v. *Nichols* concerns another kind of denial of educational opportunity. In its decision, the Court specifically stated that children have the right to be taught the English they need in order to understand, and learn in, classes taught in English.

> Basic English skills are at the very core of what these public schools teach. Imposition of a requirement that, before a child can effectively participate in the educational program, he must already have acquired those basic skills is to make a mockery of public education.[1]

The *Lau* decision doesn't mean that students are to sit uncomprehending through five classes a day while they're learning English in one.

> We know that those who do not understand English are certain to find their classroom experiences wholly incomprehensible and in no way meaningful.[2]

In short, they daily fall further behind their English-speaking peers. Therefore, their right to equal education means they will be taught in their own language what they can't yet learn in English. Teaching English, teaching in English, and teaching in the students' native language all are elements of what is called "bilingual education."

Further, the Supreme Court in its *Brown* decision recognized that students need to respect themselves and their own background if they are to learn well. Children who don't speak English at home don't just need to be taught English; they need to find their language and culture respected in the school. In addition, all children need to know and respect the various cultures of our society. So what is needed is education that's multicultural as well as bilingual.

San Francisco's Task Force on Bilingual Education summarizes the principles of the kind of education that's needed. They reason –

1. That the primary means by which a limited or non-English speaking child learns is through the use of such child's native language and culture;

2. That using the native language to teach other subjects allows the education of the child to continue uninterruptedly from home to school, thus preventing his retardation in subject matter while he learns English;

3. That teaching a child to read first in the language he brings with him when he enters school facilitates his learning to read and write in a second language because the basic skills to reading and comprehension are generally transferable from one language to another;

4. That curriculum which incorporates the student's familiar experiences, community, history, and cultural heritage will help build pride and self-confidence in the student, and by being more relevant to the student's personal experiences, heightens his interest and motivation in school;

5. That by integrating the language and cultural background of all students, bilingual-bicultural education reinforces and increases the communication between home and school, and between different ethnic groups, thus improving the student's motivation and achievement and reducing interracial misunderstanding.

The *Lau* decision affects schools from Bangor and New York to Dallas and Santa Fe and San Diego. It affects children who speak French or Spanish, Navajo, Tagalog or Samoan. However, the suit was brought on behalf of Chinese-speaking children in San Francisco. To see the conditions that prompted the suit—and what has resulted from the Supreme Court's momentous decision—NEA's Project Neglect team on Asian bilingual education conducted its study in the Asian community there.

As the team visited schools and held hearings, both teachers and aides and community members gave generously of their time and information. What it found are problems and possibilities it believes are typical of school districts where not all students speak English fluently.

"RECOGNIZING THAT WE LIVE IN A MULTI-LINGUAL AND MULTI-CULTURAL COUNTRY, IT IS THE POLICY OF THE SFUSD TO RESPECT AND NURTURE THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE OF EACH INDIVIDUAL STUDENT WHILE PREPARING HIM FOR PARTICIPATION IN A PREDOMINANTLY ENGLISH SPEAKING SOCIETY . . . "

Bilingual Policy Statement
San Francisco Unified School District

Asian history in America is long. Pilipinos had come to the West Coast in galleons before the Mayflower left Plymouth. The already sizable Asian population of the San Francisco area has been growing rapidly since the early 1960s, when immigration law reform made the city a major port of entry. Yet Asians in San Francisco are still being treated as aliens.

At present, the city is the home of 117,500 Asians and Asian Americans. They make up 17.2 percent of the total population there. The children make up 28 percent of the students in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). More precisely, according to District figures, 15.8 percent are Chinese, 7.3 percent are Pilipino, 1.7 percent are Japanese, .5 percent are Korean, and 2.7 percent are "other non-white"—they speak Samoan, Arabic, Hindi, Burmese, Vietnamese, and Pacific Island languages.

Nobody knows how many of the children speak English well enough to actually learn in "regular" classes. The District's estimates of how many do *not* are based on teachers' opinions. These figures rose from 5,269 in 1969 to 9,084 in 1973—then inexplicably fell to 4,911 by December 1974. According to San Francisco's Task Force on Bilingual Education, the actual number is probably more than 10,000. A 1972 survey found 20,000 children whose home language is other than English.

Some things about the situation, however, are known all too clearly. According to Task Force figures, in 1974, about 400 children were in "reception" programs for recent arrivals. There were 2,953 children in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. About 1,500 were in bilingual education programs; because of integration requirements, about half of these were English-speaking.